

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 IO-14 NIC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /130 W

----- 119217

R 251227Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4237

INFO AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL DURBAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 0858

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LT

SUBJ: 177 POLITICAL DETAINEES STILL HELD

REF: MASERU 366, MASERU A-17 (BOTH NOTAL)

1. LESOTHO GOVERNMENT HAS MADE NO MOVES TO DISPOSE OF CONSPIRACY CHARGES AGAINST 177 DETAINEES NOW LODGED IN MASERU'S CENTRAL JAIL. ALL ARE BEING HELD IN CONNECTION WITH JANUARY 1974 BASUTOLAND CONGRESS PARTY'S COUP ATTEMPT. THEY HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY BROUGHT BEFORE MAGISTRATES COURT IN MASERU BUT AT EACH APPEARANCE GOVERNMENT HAS ASKED FOR MORE TIME TO PREPARE ITS CASE AND ACCUSED HAVE BEEN REMANDED TO CUSTODY.

2. MOEKETSI SAMUEL SEOTSANYANA, WHO IS DEFENDING SEVERAL OF ALLEDGED CONSPIRATORS AND WHO WAS HIMSELF BRIEFLY DETAINED FOR QUESTIONING, VISITED EMBASSY LAST WEEK TO OBTAIN VISA FOR ONE-YEAR STUDY OF LAW AT YALE. DURING VISIT HE DISCUSSED LIKELY OUTCOME OF GOVERNMENT'S CASE. HE
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SAID POLICE WANT TO DROP CHARGES BUT LAW OFFICE,

WHICH IS DIRECTING PROSECUTION UNDER PRIME MINISTER'S WATCHFUL EYE, FAVORS PRESSING ON. SEOTSANYANA SAID ALMOST ALL DETAINEES WERE PICKED UP ONLY BECAUSE THEY HAD AT ONE TIME BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH BCP LEADER NTSU MOKHEHLE. HE THOUGHT ALL 177 WOULD BE RELEASED WITHOUT TRIAL IN ONE OR TWO MONTHS AS GOVERNMENT HAD NO CASE AGAINST THEM.

3. SEOTSANYANA SAID SOME OF MORE PROMINENT BCP DETAINEES, PARTICULARLY SHAKHANE MOKHELE, PARTY TREASURER AND NTSU'S BROTHER, AND HATELA THABANE, PARTY CHAIRMAN OF MASERU DISTRICT, HAD BEEN BRUTALLY BEATEN. HE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE THAT GOL WAITING FOR THEM TO RECOVER BEFORE LETTING DETAINEES GO.

4. OF HIS OWN DETENTION, SEOTSANYANA SAID HE HAD BEEN UNDER SUSPICION BECAUSE OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH SOME OF NTSU MOKHEHLE'S CONFEDERATES AND POLICE ALSO INCORRECTLY THOUGHT THEY COULD GET EVIDENCE FROM HIM AGAINST ACCUSED CONSPIRATORS.

5. IN SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT, WE HAVE LEARNED THAT BAREUD VAN NIEKERK, PROFESSOR OF LAW AT UNIVERSITY OF NATAL, CALLED LAST WEEK ON MINISTER OF JUSTICE C.D. MOLAPO ON BEHALF OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. TRIP ARRANGED BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IN RESPONSE TO STORIES ABOUT POLICE ATROCITIES IN LESOTHO AND CONTINUED DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL OF 177 ALLEDGED CONSPIRATORS. MOLAPO WAS WRONG MAN TO TALK TO AS IT IS LAW OFFICE WHICH DECIDES ISSUES OF PROSECUTIONS AND DETENTIONS. NEVERTHELESS, VAN NIEKERK'S MESSAGE LIKELY TO HAVE GOTTEN BACK TO PRIME MINISTER BUT VISIT HAS UNDERSTANDABLY RECEIVED NO PUBLICITY HERE.
HAUGHT

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DETENTION, ATTORNEYS, POLICE FORCES, SECURITY VIOLATIONS, ARRESTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 JUL 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: kelleyw0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974MASERU00858
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740201-1205
From: MASERU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740718/aaaaapkp.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: MASERU 366, MASERU A-17 (BOTH NOTAL)
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: kelleyw0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 AUG 2002 by rowelle0>; APPROVED <24 FEB 2003 by kelleyw0>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: 177 POLITICAL DETAINEES STILL HELD
TAGS: PINT, LT, BASUTOLAND CONGRESS PARTY, BCP, (SEOTSANYANA, SAMUEL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005